

INTERFAITH INSIGHT

Religious leader named Templeton Prize winner

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Last week, the Templeton Foundation announced the 46th recipient of the Templeton Prize for Progress in Spiritual Understanding to Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, the former Chief Rabbi of Great Britain.



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The prize was established by Sir John Templeton in 1972, when it was given to Mother Teresa.

Since that time, there has been an impressive list of recipients, including the Dalai Lama, Desmond Tutu and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, as well as a number of scientists who made significant contributions in the area of science and religion. The prize is valued at \$1.5 million.

Readers of the Interfaith Insights will recognize Sacks' name if for no other reason than he is a hero of mine, whom I have often quoted.



Sacks

Most influential to me have been three of his books: "The Dignity of Difference: How to Avoid the Clash of Civilizations," published in 2003; "The Great Partnership: Science, Religion, and the Search for Meaning" (2014); and "Not in God's Name: Confronting Religious Violence," published last fall.

I also had the privilege of meeting him and hearing him speak when I was a visiting fellow at the Cambridge Inter-Faith Programme in Cambridge, England. Numerous videos of his talks are available online and

hearing him speak is always a great joy and most stimulating. I highly recommend that you do an online search for his videos, and a good place to start is at youtu.be/MjoWMpcePQ8.

Sacks believes the assumption that secularization and modern science will solve our problems is a gross over-simplification. Not only does it fail to take account of the persistence of faith, it is helpless in addressing the human condition. In his words:

"None of the four great institutions of the modern age — science, technology, the market economy or the liberal democratic state — offers a compelling answer to the three great questions every reflective human being will ask at some stage in life: Who am I? Why am I here? How then shall I live? These belong to a different universe of discourse to that charted by science."

He makes the following distinction: "Science takes things apart to see how they work. Religion puts things together to see what they mean. We will always inhabit a world of the spirit that searches not just for explanation but also for meaning."

His perspective on the need for religious persons to respect those who believe differently or who are not theists appears in many of his writings. In his prepared remarks at the announcement of the prize he said:

"We need to work as hard as we can to enhance mutual respect and friendship between faiths. There is no one formula as to how to do this. ... The message of monotheism is not 'one God, one truth, one way,' but rather the miracle that unity in heaven creates diversity on earth. I have argued that the book of Genesis, from which Judaism, Christianity and Islam all take inspiration,

tells us that our shared humanity precedes and transcends our religious differences. ... If religion is not part of the solution, it will assuredly be a large part of the problem as voices become ever more strident and religious extremists ever more violent.

"The imperative ... is to be true to your faith while being a blessing to others, regardless of their faith. The God of Abraham asks us to turn our face outward to the world, recognizing his image, even in the people who are not in our image, whose faith is not mine, whose color and culture are not mine, yet whose humanity is as God-given and consecrated as mine."

On the world stage, Sacks has challenged us all in his call for mutual respect and acceptance. He is an inspiration to me personally and for much of what we do in our interfaith efforts toward understanding and service.